

Re: FPSC Docket No. 20250052 – CSWR-Florida Utility Operating Company Rate Increase Request

Specifically: Sebring Ridge Interim Rates and Proposed Rate Increase

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing as a customer of the Sebring Ridge utility system to express my concern regarding the rate increases proposed by CSWR-Florida Utility Operating Company and the significant financial burden already being imposed through interim rates.

While I understand that utilities must maintain infrastructure and recover prudent and reasonable costs, I respectfully urge the Commission to consider the unique circumstances facing Sebring Ridge customers. According to testimony in this proceeding, Sebring Ridge had not received a significant rate increase since approximately 1996. Current residents did not make the decisions that resulted in decades without rate adjustments, nor did they have any role in the utility's historical management. It seems inequitable for today's customers to bear the full financial consequences of those past decisions through sudden and dramatic rate increases.

Many Sebring Ridge residents are retirees, seniors, and individuals living on low or fixed incomes. For these households, wastewater services are essential necessities. Increases reported to exceed 267 percent are not merely inconvenient; they can create significant financial hardship and force residents to reconsider other basic household expenses.

The impact is not theoretical. The interim rates currently in effect are already affecting customers. Residents are experiencing substantially higher monthly bills before a final determination has been made in this case. For many households, these increased costs are creating financial uncertainty and concerns regarding long-term affordability.

In my own case, I chose to purchase a home in this area in part because it was affordable for a single homeowner. My monthly CSWR wastewater bill has increased from approximately \$16 to approximately \$60. While some may argue that customers benefited from historically low rates, that assumption does not reflect the circumstances of all current residents. Many customers moved to the community long after those historical decisions were made and should not be viewed as having received decades of financial benefit that must now be repaid through extraordinary rate increases.

I respectfully request that the Commission carefully consider the affordability of any final rate decision and evaluate measures that could reduce the immediate impact on customers, including:

- A multi-year phase-in of any approved rate increases.
- Annual caps on customer bill increases to minimize rate shock.
- Special consideration for senior citizens and low-income households.
- Recognition that current customers should not be required to absorb decades of deferred rate adjustments through a single rate case.
- Evaluation of opportunities for customer growth and system expansion to increase revenue and spread fixed costs across a broader customer base.
- A thorough review of all requested expenses to ensure that only prudent, necessary, and well-supported costs are passed on to customers.

I am not asking the Commission to disregard the utility's responsibility to operate and maintain its system. Rather, I am asking that any necessary rate increases be implemented in a fair and reasonable manner that recognizes the realities faced by the residents who depend on these services every day.

CSWR knowingly acquired the Sebring Ridge utility system, including its infrastructure needs, existing rate structure, and relatively small customer base. These factors were known or should have been known at the time of acquisition. As a result, customers should be protected from bearing a disproportionate share of the financial consequences associated with that business decision.

The Commission's decision in this matter will have a significant impact on families throughout Sebring Ridge. I respectfully urge you to protect customers from excessive rate shock and to ensure that any approved increases are implemented gradually and fairly.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and for your service to the citizens of Florida.

Respectfully submitted,

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cc: Highlands Co. Commissioners, Docket 20250052 OPC Representatives

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